

# 1.1

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## MAKE IT OKAY

Although mental health issues are widespread, they are treatable. Through learning and talking openly about mental illness, the stigma associated with these conditions can be reduced and prevention and early treatment encouraged. Life can get better for the individual struggling with a mental illness, and recovery is possible.

# MAKE IT OKAY

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In this lesson you will:

- Gain an understanding of the stigma associated with mental health disorders and its impact
- Learn how to identify the onset of mental illness
- Review strategies for supporting someone dealing with a mental health disorder

## MAKE IT OKAY

### What is 'Make It OK' ?

When a mental health crisis was identified in Crow Wing County, Crow Wing Energized began to look for resources and strategies that could help people in the early stages of mental illness. The goal was to reduce the stigma associated with reaching out for help with mental health. One of those resources was a presentation called Make It OK that had been developed by health partners over ten years ago and made available as a free resource to anyone and any organization throughout Minnesota. The goal of this presentation is to make it ok to talk about mental health issues so that we can increase our understanding and be able to promote better mental health by sharing our knowledge.

### Mental Illness is Not Uncommon

Mental illness, in reality, is not uncommon. One in five adults (18 years and older) in the United States will be diagnosed with a mental health concern. The latest research by Crow Wing Energized and Crow Wing County has found that mental illness occurs in more than one in four adults in the county. Depression and anxiety were more common than diabetes. This is most likely an underreporting as it is known that many people don't seek the professional help that would lead to a diagnosis because of the stigma associated with mental illness.

It's OK...  
to have a mental illness, many of us do.

### Mental Health



Depression and anxiety are  
more common than diabetes

1 in 5 adults nationally will experience a mental illness

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### Other Statistics: per NAMI

- 1 in 20 U.S. adults experience serious mental illness each year
- 1 in 6 U.S. youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year
- 50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24

Considering that mental health issues are treatable and life CAN get better, reducing the stigma that causes delay in getting treatment is critical to saving lives! It's never too late, and it's never too early to get help for a mental illness. There is no rule that says you need to be in crisis in order to reach out for help by calling a support or text line, or making an appointment with a counselor. Delaying

treatment can lead to loss of job and income or dropping out of school. Some situations may lead to jail and even suicide.

### Overcoming the Stigma

Stigma is a negative perception that causes someone to devalue or think less of a person. It involves stereotyping or labeling someone because of their condition. In our midwestern culture where you “pull yourself up by your bootstraps”, talking about personal struggles can be a challenge and mental illness may be perceived as a weakness

Consider:

*What comes to your mind when you picture a person with a mental illness?*

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*What are some slang terms that are used to describe people experiencing a mental illness?*

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The truth is that mental illness is no respecter of persons; it affects celebrities, successful athletes, our neighbors, our family members, our friends, and ourselves.

Ask yourself:

*Am I more comfortable helping someone with a physical injury than with a mental health struggle?*

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*Are people in my community caring towards people with mental illness?*

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*Would I would see myself as weak if I had a mental illness and could not fix it?*

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Consider the derogatory slang terms like “crazy,” used for people experiencing a mental illness and compare them to the descriptions used for those who are battling cancer - phrases like “they’re courageous; they’re a fighter.” Both cancer and mental health issues concern the physical body and both require help. Mental illness is a medical illness, although a survey showed most people thought it was solely related to stress, lack of willpower, or a character flaw.

According to the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI), the research on mental illness “suggests multiple, linking causes” that include lifestyle influence,

environment, and genetics. Stress on the job or in the home, as well as traumatic life events will make some people more susceptible to disruption of their mental health. Your brain as an organ is affected by the environment, trauma, chemical imbalances, and genetics. As the field of neuroscience continues to develop, the understanding of the role that biochemical processes, neural circuits and basic brain structure have on mental health is increasing.

You may be accustomed to considering genetic susceptibility for other diseases and being proactive in prevention through early screening and our lifestyle choices. Are you doing the same if mental illness seems to be a trait in your family? By openly talking about mental illness in our families, early detection of symptoms will be encouraged and a desire to avoid deeper mental health issues can prompt people to ask for help.

### Identifying the Onset of Mental Health Issues

The number one symptom to watch for with mental health disturbances is a change in sleep. People who have dealt with mental illness for many years say that their first indication that it's time to readjust their care is when they find themselves oversleeping, having trouble sleeping, or experiencing significant sleep disruptions. There can also be a change in energy or appetite. Mental illness may cause the person to have a lack of interest or a loss of pleasure in activities they normally enjoy. They may have difficulty thinking, concentrating or

remembering. There can be physical indications as well such as a pounding heart, sweating, trembling, or dizziness. Depending on the type of mental illness, people can deal with delusions or hallucinations. They might have grandiose plans, or persistently be sad or impulsive.

A number of mental health disorders have a single diagnosis; they include anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder (or PTSD), eating disorders, ADHD, borderline personality disorder, postpartum depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Of course, there are situations where people have multiple diagnoses. Either way, it's OK because mental illnesses are treatable, and life can get better. Did you know that most mental illnesses can be treated effectively with medication, therapy, diet, exercise, and support? Recovery is possible!

### Common Symptoms



## Supporting Persons with Mental Illness

How do you support someone who's dealing with a mental illness? First, stop the silence! Call it out; ask about it; and be nice. Most importantly, listen. Being a good listener can make all the difference. If someone shares a struggle they've gone through, check in with them a few days later with a text or a meet for coffee to see how they're doing. Stay in contact and don't ignore the issue. Keep the conversation going.

What can you say, and what should you avoid saying? People who have battled mental illness share stories about words that feel hurtful. Some of the examples include being called "crazy" or "psychotic"; or hearing the phrase "committed suicide" which can sound like a crime when in reality, they lost their battle with depression after a courageous fight.

When someone shares with you the challenges that they're facing, remember to thank them for opening up. Recognize that it was a brave thing for them to share what was on their heart. Ask them if they want to talk more about it. Ask how you can help.

Avoid saying things that de-emphasize or minimize the importance of what they're sharing with you, such as "it could be worse," "snap out of it," or "everyone feels that way sometimes." Although it's true that everyone does have moments of feeling anxious or sad, not everyone experiences the intensity of a mental

illness. Acknowledge the uniqueness of the person's experience, and avoid saying, "We've all been there."

The tendency is to give advice, but few people are willing to walk alongside someone struggling with mental health issues. Community members with in-patient experience for mental health disturbances described how other people would often suggest exercise. One former patient, a young lady, said, "I wish someone would say, "Would you like to go for a walk with me?" Are you willing to walk alongside people dealing with mental health issues and have the hard conversations?

**Learn What To Say**

	
"Thanks for opening up to me."	"It could be worse."
"How can I help?"	"Snap out of it."
"Do you want to talk about it?"	"Everyone feels that way sometimes."
"I'm sorry to hear that. It must be tough."	"We've all been there."
"I'm here for you when you need me."	"Pull yourself together."
"Can I drive you to an appointment?"	"What's wrong with you?"
"How are you feeling today?"	"Try thinking happy thoughts."

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### Put it Into Practice:

*Your best friend comes over and says they haven't been feeling well lately. They say they have been diagnosed with anxiety and sometimes it feels like their heart is pounding so hard they feel like they are having a heart attack.*

*What do you say?*

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Remember, the most important thing you can do is listen and encourage your friend to talk. Phrases like “Tell me more,” and “Tell me what that’s like” will help keep the conversation going. If you have someone who is talking about how depressed they are, and you sense there is a risk of the person ending their life, it’s okay to ask them if they’ve thought about suicide. If their answer is ‘yes’, go ahead and ask them if they have made a plan. You are not planting a seed; you are asking a question to which they will probably share an honest answer. Keeping the conversation going is paramount. Research shows that by encouraging the other person to talk, the feelings they are experiencing will eventually pass - so be an active listener and just keep asking questions.

As a supportive friend, you might feel prompted to ask “Is there something I can do to help?” but do not think that the problem is all yours to handle. If the content of the conversation begins to feel beyond your boundaries or capabilities as a supportive friend, it’s ok to call someone else. There are resources.

## Resources

Texting or calling **988** will connect you with the national crisis line. Don’t hesitate; don’t question if it’s bad enough to call - just call.

Another resource that is available to help you learn more about mental illnesses, how to help yourself, how to help others, and give you the opportunity to hear

from others who have lived experience is the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). Their website - [namihelps.org](http://namihelps.org) - has a number of resources including classes that are available online for no charge. The Minnesota chapter of NAMI also holds classes which at times are offered in the Lakes Area. Otherwise the classes are offered online and available by signing up.

The **Make it OK** website has lots of good information including talking tips that you can print out and have close by. Make it OK did have a partner podcast which is no longer producing new episodes but past episodes are archived and available on the website “Hilarious World of Depression”, or anywhere you can access podcasts. You’ll hear the personal stories of celebrities who, in the face of depression and feeling like there was nothing left to do, were able to break through with laughter.

Gratitude is a tool that has been shown to build resiliency. Research has revealed that taking time to note three things for which you are thankful - 3 things you consider good - can actually change your brain patterns. In light of this finding, Crow Wing Energized has made available “3 Good Things” notepads that can be requested on their website. Set them alongside your bed for morning or night, or have one at the table for family mealtimes. Note three good things you’ve noticed every day for a week, or maybe a month, and see how your thought patterns change.

## Getting Help

Reduce the stigma that prevents people from seeking help by talking openly with your family about your own mental illness, or opening a conversation with a person who is struggling with their mental health.

It's okay to talk to a person with mental health issues about seeking professional help. Become aware of the resources that can be leveraged and share the information with others. For example, many employers offer employee assistance programs that can cover referrals to counseling and often a few free appointments. In many cases, that help is also available for family members. Talk with the human resources department to find out more about what is covered through an employer. Talking to a family physician is also a good option. Today's family physicians are trained in asking the right questions, and helping the person with mental health issues navigate the system. This could include connecting with counseling, or in the case of a chemical imbalance, having a conversation about prescriptions, or a combination of both.

In the Lakes Area there are many providers offering different types of therapies and counseling as well as online options. The Lakes Area Crisis Line and Referral Service is free and can be reached at 218.848.4357. There is also a 'warm' line at 844.739.6369 that is available from 5 pm until 9 am because the dark hours can be the really tough hours. Volunteers with some lived experience run this line and are prepared to come alongside a person who just really needs to talk with someone who understands.

## Make It OK

The challenge of 'make it ok' is to keep learning, and then be brave enough to apply what you've learned. Open up conversations about where you're at personally with your mental health, and give loved ones the opportunity to talk about where they're at with their mental health. If you yourself have dealt with a mental illness, share your experience with your family so that the stigma surrounding these conditions begins to break down in our community. Take time to reduce the stigma of mental illness and become an advocate of making it ok.

**How to get help**

**COUNSELING**  
There are many providers offering therapy and mental health services in the area. Virtual options are also available.

**WARM LINE**  
- 5 p.m.-9 a.m. listen/support adults experiencing emotional distress 844-739-6369

**CRISIS SERVICES**  
- Crisis Line & Referral Service: Call 218-828-4357 or 1-800-462-5525  
- Crisis Text Line: Text "MN" to 741741

**988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE**

**24/7 CALL, TEXT, CHAT**

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## DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What do you do to maintain or improve your mental health?
2. How do you feel about seeking mental health support?
3. How can friendship and support help someone with a mental health issue?
4. What can family and community members do to promote mental wellness?
5. What needs to be done in your community to end any stigma or discrimination against people living with a mental illness?

## PRACTICE, ROLE PLAY, OR MORE TO CONSIDER

1. Take the following survey to explore your personal attitudes towards mental health issues; then individually or as a group, read through the following resource page “Real Truths about Mental Illness”

### Personal Attitudes Survey

Check the most appropriate answer:

- |  |              |                 |                 |
|--|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. People should work out their own mental health problems.              | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Not sure</i> |
| 2. Once you have a mental illness, you have it for life.                 | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Not sure</i> |
| 3. Females are more likely to have a mental illness than males are.      | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Not sure</i> |
| 4. Medication is the best treatment for mental illness.                  | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Not sure</i> |
| 5. People with a mental illness are generally violent and dangerous.     | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Not sure</i> |
| 6. Adults are more likely than teenagers to have a mental illness.       | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Not sure</i> |
| 7. You can tell by looking at people whether they have a mental illness. | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Not sure</i> |
| 8. People with a mental illness are generally shy and quiet.             | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Not sure</i> |
| 9. Most people will never be affected by mental illness.                 | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Not sure</i> |

*\*Adapted from the Mental Health and High School Curriculum Guide from the Canadian Mental Health Association, available online at [www.cmha.ca/highschoolcurriculum](http://www.cmha.ca/highschoolcurriculum).*

## PRACTICE, ROLE PLAY, OR MORE TO CONSIDER

**2. Describe a supportive conversation for the following scenario:**

You have crossed paths a few times with an acquaintance in the community who frequently appears upset. The next time you are walking at the city park, you see them sitting alone in a more private spot, and they appear to be crying. How could you initiate a conversation with them? What would a supportive conversation sound like?

**3. Three Good Things (Crow Wing Energized)**

Being aware of good things in your daily life can significantly improve mental, social, and physical well-being. Practice noting three good things to develop an “attitude of gratitude.”

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

# PRACTICE, ROLE PLAY, OR MORE TO CONSIDER

## Real Truths About Mental Illness

**1. People should work out their own mental health problems.**

Not true. People with physical health concerns often go to the doctor or seek some other kind of help for their problems. Mental illness is associated with changes in brain functioning and usually requires professional assistance. Because of the stigma surrounding mental illness, many people are reluctant to seek help.

**2. Once you have a mental illness, you have it for life.**

While it's true that most mental illnesses are lifelong, they are often episodic, which means that the symptoms are not always present. Just like people who live with chronic physical illnesses like arthritis and asthma, people can manage their mental illness and live positive and productive lives.

**3. Females are more likely to have a mental illness than males are.**

Men and women are equally affected by mental illness in general, but women may experience higher rates of specific illnesses such as eating disorders and depression. Men have higher rates for some disorders such as alcoholism and ADHD. Some illnesses are relatively equally shared by men and women, like bipolar disorder. It may seem that women are more likely to have a mental illness than men, but this may be because women are more likely to seek help for mental and emotional difficulties and to share their concerns with friends than are men.

**4. Medication is the best treatment for mental illness.**

Medication can be a very effective part of managing a mental illness, but it is by no means the only type of treatment or support that helps people recover. A wide range of appropriate interventions, including medication, counseling, social and recreational groups, self-help, holistic health, religious support, hospital care, exercise, and nutrition are options for helping people recover and stay well. The best approach is to have a combination of strategies that have been proven to be effective.

**5. People with a mental illness are generally violent and dangerous.**

People with mental illness are generally not more violent than the rest of the population and in the majority of violent crimes, mental illness plays no part. In fact, a person with a mental illness is more likely to be a victim of violence than the perpetrator. The assumption that any and every mental illness carries with it an almost certain potential for violence has been proven wrong in many studies. Often, it is the misrepresentation by the media that leads to this false belief.

**Real Truths About Mental Illness (continued)**

**6. Adults are more likely than teenagers to have a mental illness.**

Some illnesses are first diagnosed in childhood but many more begin to appear during the late teenage years and into early adulthood.

**7. You can tell by looking at people whether they have a mental illness.**

Sometimes if a person is experiencing symptoms of their mental illness, how they are feeling, thinking, and behaving may be different from what is normal for them. Generally, however, you cannot tell if a person has a mental illness based on his or her appearance.

**8. People with a mental illness are generally shy and quiet.**

Personality characteristics have no strong causal relationship with the tendency to develop mental illness. Certain mental disorders can lead people to avoid or limit social contact, e.g. depression, anxiety, schizophrenia.

**9. Most people will never be affected by mental illness.**

Considering that one in five adults in the U.S. will experience a mental illness at some point in their life, it is likely that most everyone is affected by mental illness, either directly (by having a mental illness themselves) or indirectly (by knowing someone with a mental illness).

## PRACTICE, ROLE PLAY, OR MORE TO CONSIDER

### TAKE DOWN THE WALLS

There is no simple or single strategy to eliminate the stigma associated with mental illness, but some positive steps can be taken. Remember the acronym “WALLS” to help reduce stigma.

**Watch** your language - Make sure you are not using language or comments that stigmatize people with mental illness.

**Ask** questions - A lot can be learned by asking questions of a mental health professional like a counsellor or doctor, or a person who has lived experience with a mental illness.

**Learn** more - Great resources are available online to help educate you on different mental illnesses. Increased education means fewer misunderstandings and less stigma.

**Listen** to experiences - Once you have learned a bit about mental illness, consider asking someone you know about their experience with mental illness. If you are considerate and respectful, they may be comfortable speaking about their experiences. If you have lived experience, consider sharing your story with others.

**Speak** out - Help reduce stigma by speaking out when others stigmatize people with mental illnesses or spread misconceptions.

*\*Adapted from the Mental Health and High School Curriculum Guide from the Canadian Mental Health Association, available online at [www.cmha.ca/highschoolcurriculum](http://www.cmha.ca/highschoolcurriculum).*

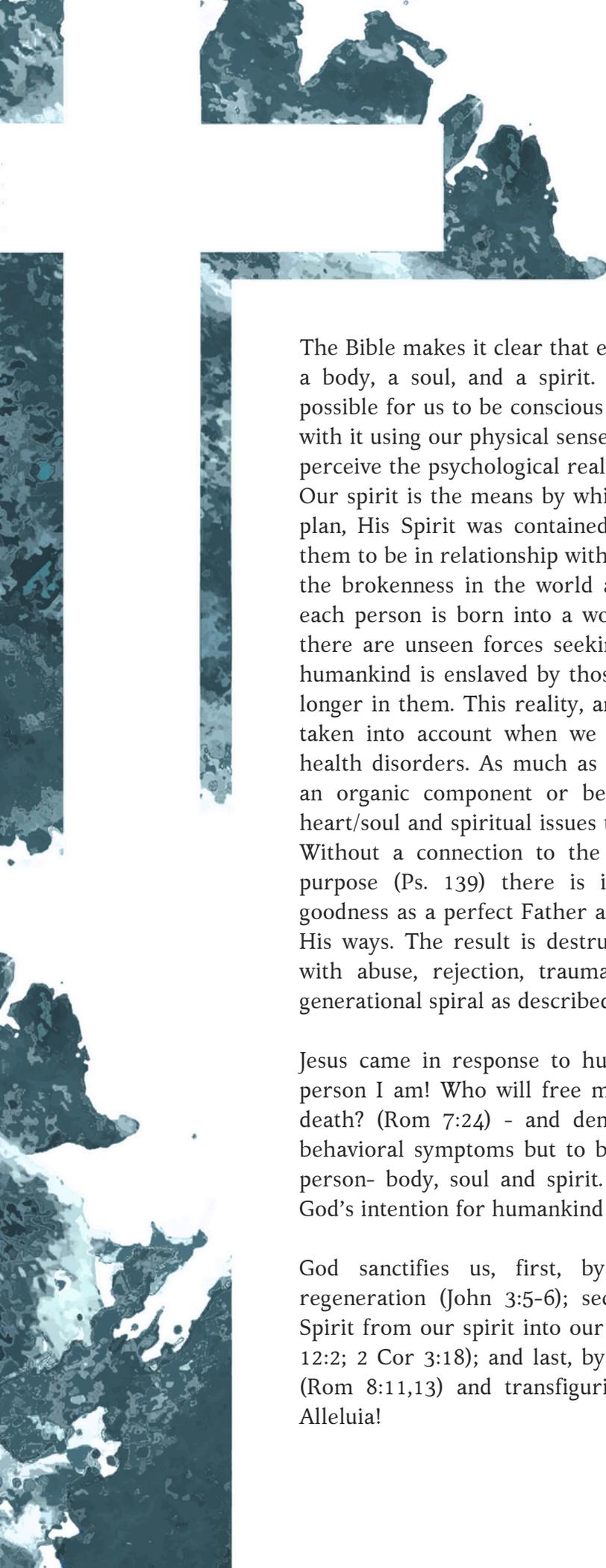
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Makeitok.org Since 2012, Make It OK has worked to change attitudes and end the stigma surrounding mental health and illnesses

The Place We Find Ourselves: a podcast featuring therapist Adam Young (LCSW, MDiv) and guests who have engaged their own experiences of trauma and abuse. Together they unpack how trauma and abuse impact the heart and mind, as well as how to navigate the path toward healing, wholeness, and restoration. Drawing from the work of neuroscientists such as Dan Siegel and Bessel van der Kolk, as well as psychologist Dan Allender, this podcast will equip and inspire you to engage your own stories of harm in deep, transformative ways.



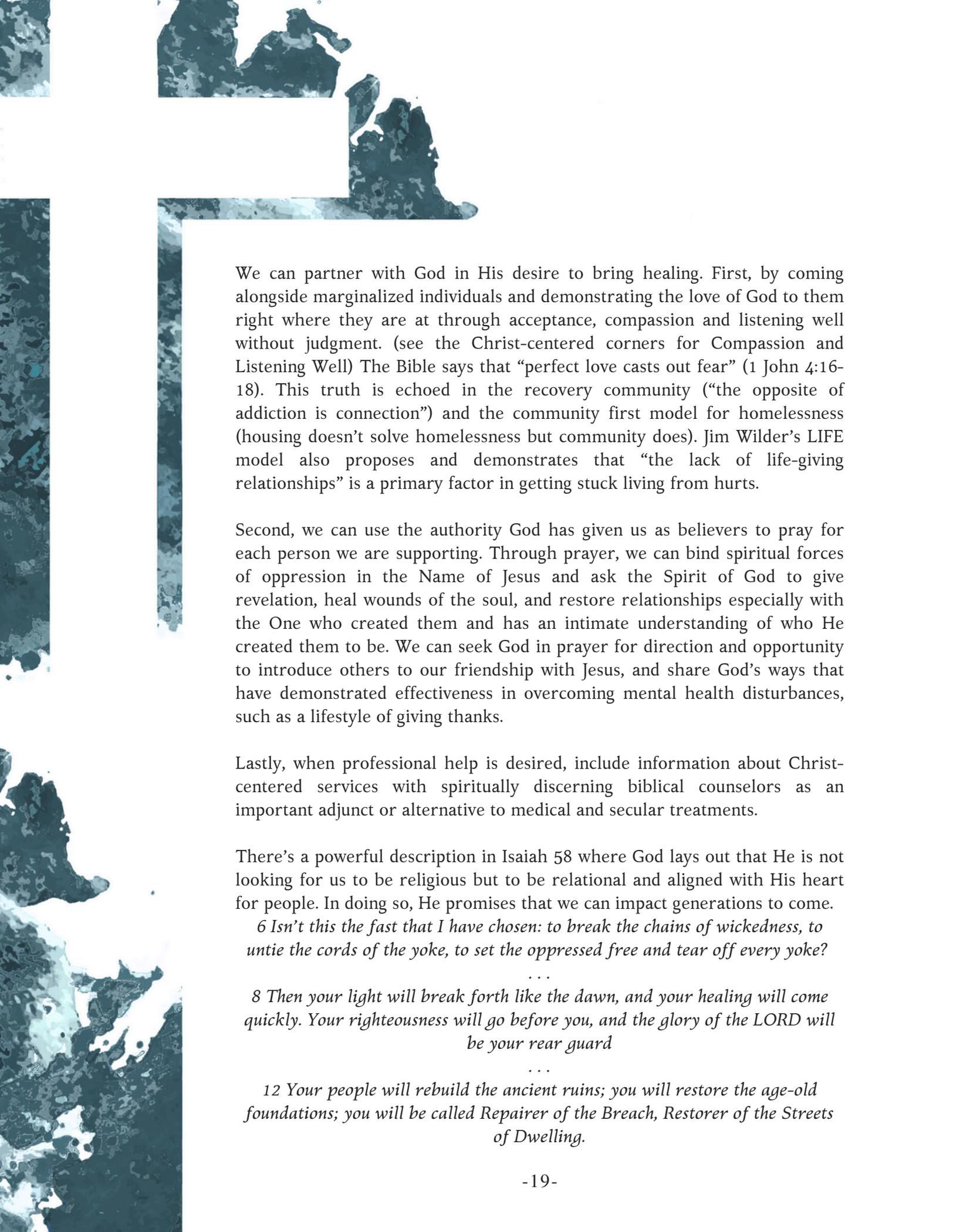
## Christ-Centered Corner

*encouragement from a Christian perspective*

The Bible makes it clear that each person has been created with three parts - a body, a soul, and a spirit. (1 Thess 5:23). Our physical bodies make it possible for us to be conscious of the natural world around us and to interact with it using our physical senses. Our soul is our personality and enables us to perceive the psychological realm - feeling emotions, reasoning, imagining, etc. Our spirit is the means by which we connect with God, and in God's original plan, His Spirit was contained and expressed in the human spirit enabling them to be in relationship with Him. According to the Bible, and evidenced by the brokenness in the world around us, this is no longer the case. Rather, each person is born into a world where, as Jesus demonstrated and taught, there are unseen forces seeking to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10), and humankind is enslaved by those same forces because the Spirit of God is no longer in them. This reality, and Jesus' demonstrated power over it, must be taken into account when we consider solutions and treatment for mental health disorders. As much as behavioral and emotional conditions can have an organic component or be of biological origins, so also can there be heart/soul and spiritual issues that can contribute to or lead to mental illness. Without a connection to the One who created them with purpose for a purpose (Ps. 139) there is identity confusion, an inability to see God's goodness as a perfect Father and an unwillingness to trust Him and follow in His ways. The result is destructive life choices, brokenness in relationships with abuse, rejection, trauma, shame, guilt and a downward, potentially generational spiral as described in Romans 1:1-31.

Jesus came in response to humankind's heart cry - Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? (Rom 7:24) - and demonstrated God's heart to not just deal with behavioral symptoms but to bring healing and transformation to the whole person- body, soul and spirit. The New Testament Recovery version states God's intention for humankind as follows:

God sanctifies us, first, by taking possession of our spirit through regeneration (John 3:5-6); second by spreading Himself as the life-giving Spirit from our spirit into our soul to saturate and transform our soul (Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18); and last, by enlivening our mortal body through our soul (Rom 8:11,13) and transfiguring our body by His life power (Phil 3:21)." Alleluia!



We can partner with God in His desire to bring healing. First, by coming alongside marginalized individuals and demonstrating the love of God to them right where they are at through acceptance, compassion and listening well without judgment. (see the Christ-centered corners for Compassion and Listening Well) The Bible says that “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:16-18). This truth is echoed in the recovery community (“the opposite of addiction is connection”) and the community first model for homelessness (housing doesn’t solve homelessness but community does). Jim Wilder’s LIFE model also proposes and demonstrates that “the lack of life-giving relationships” is a primary factor in getting stuck living from hurts.

Second, we can use the authority God has given us as believers to pray for each person we are supporting. Through prayer, we can bind spiritual forces of oppression in the Name of Jesus and ask the Spirit of God to give revelation, heal wounds of the soul, and restore relationships especially with the One who created them and has an intimate understanding of who He created them to be. We can seek God in prayer for direction and opportunity to introduce others to our friendship with Jesus, and share God’s ways that have demonstrated effectiveness in overcoming mental health disturbances, such as a lifestyle of giving thanks.

Lastly, when professional help is desired, include information about Christ-centered services with spiritually discerning biblical counselors as an important adjunct or alternative to medical and secular treatments.

There’s a powerful description in Isaiah 58 where God lays out that He is not looking for us to be religious but to be relational and aligned with His heart for people. In doing so, He promises that we can impact generations to come.

*6 Isn’t this the fast that I have chosen: to break the chains of wickedness, to untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and tear off every yoke?*

...

*8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will come quickly. Your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard*

...

*12 Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins; you will restore the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of the Breach, Restorer of the Streets of Dwelling.*

